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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF
INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS
DEC 22 1969

FROM : AmEmbassy GUATEMALA

DATE: 12-15-69

SUBJECT: INTERNAL SECURITY: Monthly Report of Incidents,
November 1969

REF :

SUMMARY

November produced several dramatic incidents of guerrilla activity, but across the board the level of politically motivated violence registered a slight decline. Undoubtedly, the most significant event during the period was the appearance of a guerrilla band at Ixcán, in northern Quiché, and the continuing efforts of security forces to locate and trap the raiders. Urban terrorists were believed responsible for the kidnapping of a wealthy industrialist and at least two premature explosions which killed one FAR member. In the North-east, several comisionados militares were slain during the month, while in San Marcos coffee growers expressed concern at increased "criminal" activity. The heretofore tranquil political campaign heated up toward the end of the month when several bombings occurred at Rightist headquarters, and the governing Revolutionary Party engineered a number of military command changes apparently designed to remove outspoken Rightists from key positions.

1. On November 18, word reached the Quiché Military Base that a group of approximately two dozen well-armed men had taken over three small fincas along the Copon River. The Army moved cautiously into the heavily jungled area and set up a command post at the fincas while planning to block the anticipated escape route. Air Force C-47s daringly dropped 40 elite paratroopers of Guatemala's Rapid Reaction Force into a sand spit between two rivers. Four men drowned when a fluky wind forced them into the swollen river.

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FORM 4-62 DS-323

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On November 27 the military received word that the band was at Ixcán, to the west of the previous report. This time the Army moved quickly, bringing more paratroopers into the zone in the only two high performance helicopters available. Automatic fire met the helicopters after they had brought in the pathfinder team. F-51s flying air cover demolished the snipers' shack, and the paratroop unit began to track the guerrillas while blocking forces moved from the Copon to meet the band. Two fire fights took place on December 5 at the foot of the steep Chama escarpment. Although security forces believe as many as six of the band are injured, they still have no guerrillas to show for the costly operation. Amazingly, the Quiche movements aroused little interest in Guatemala even after the Army reported the paratroopers lost during "special operations."

2. Urban Terrorism/New Chief of National Police -

When Alan PLIHAL McLennon, son of a wealthy industrial family, was kidnapped on November 4, few could foresee that the Judicial Police would once again have a new Chief as a result. The Plihal family refused to cooperate with the judiciales or other security forces and apparently entered into a series of negotiations with his captors over the ransom sum.

Untactfully, Col. Mario BARRIOS Pena, designated Chief of the Judiciales on October 10, informed the press that security forces had known of the threat against Plihal and had him under observation, but he admitted that a police slip-up had permitted the abduction. This and other candid admissions led to his removal. Army Major Edilberto LETONA Linares, most recently serving as head of the Telecommunications Center, replaced him on November 7.

Young Plihal appeared early in December and entered a private hospital to "recuperate from his ordeal". Although the family refused to comment, the press reports that the ransom may have been as much as \$400,000. The general belief is that the Rebel Armed Forces were responsible but we have received no confirmation that such is the case. (See also A-294 [REDACTED])

On November 13 and 21, blasts shook houses in Zones 11 and 1, respectively. Both are believed to have resulted from premature detonations of devices being constructed by terrorists. In the first case, police found signs of blood; in the second they found the body of a low-level FAR member and a woman reportedly the wife of ex-guerrilla chieftain Edgar Ibarra. Break-ins at several pharmacies during the month led to speculation that some terrorists had indeed suffered injuries. For example, on

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November 23 at Coatepeque, Quezaltenango, police stumbled upon a robbery attempt, and two of their members were seriously wounded in the ensuing gunfight with the well-armed raiders.

3. Rural Criminality

Coffee producers complained to the GOG that "criminality" was markedly on the rise in San Marcos where on November 5 a finquero was assassinated and robbed of a substantial payroll. Perhaps as a result of increased policing, violent deaths decreased in San Marcos during the month. In the Northeast, the month began with the slayings of comisionados militares in Zacapa, Izabal and Chiquimula. No pattern for these killings emerged, however, indicating that personal vendettas rather than terrorist action groups were the probable cause.

Friction reportedly developed between the Governor of Zacapa, Col. Manuel RECINOS, and the commander of the powerful Zacapa Base, Col. ECHEVERRIA Vielman, because of the "undue" support Echeverria was giving to well-known Rightist vigilantes. The pro-PR Governor allegedly brought 16 Judicial Police into Zacapa to assist him in keeping the Rightists under control. Tensions increased between the two when Echeverria returned most of the weapons collected during the latest "depistolization" drive. On November 28, Echeverria was transferred to Quezaltenango and switched places with Col. Conrado MIRANDA, a capable officer, who had been commanding the Quezaltenango unit.

4. Political Campaign Affects Security Picture

Violence associated with the political campaign increased markedly during the last weeks of November and included two bombs at the MLN headquarters in Guatemala City and one each at Coatepeque and La Union, San Marcos. Cynics blame the MLN for what they call "auto-bombas". On November 30, both the PR and the MLN claimed that tacks had been strewn on the road to delay candidates' cavalcades, and the DCG contended that someone (probably from the PR) had driven a car into one of their small rallies. The media vigorously condemned all the purported incidents, and the electoral climate had once again improved in early December.

Political considerations motivated the PR to initiate a series of command changes even before the Echeverria case mentioned above. Foremost was the replacement of Puerto Barrios Military Base Commander, General GIRON Natareno, who had been outspoken in his support for Rightist candidate Colonel Arana. A number of other changes followed Giron's removal, all designed to reduce the influence of Arana backers. Giron was to have been assigned to Panama as Military Attache, but so far has managed to resist the shift and is still in Guatemala City. Military officers seem to have quietly accepted the reshufflings.

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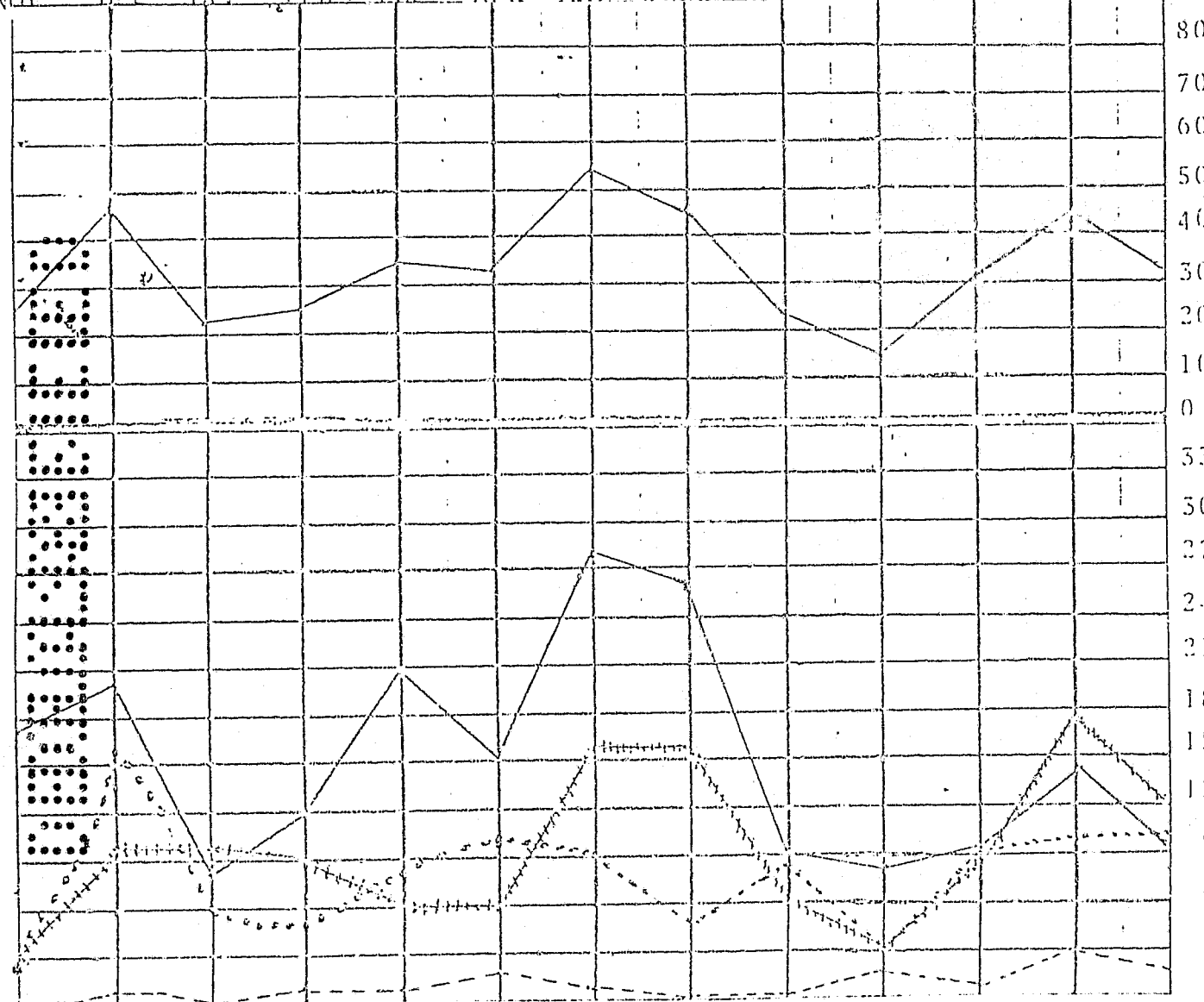
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MONTHLY FREQUENCY OF TERRORIST RELATED INCIDENTS BY REGION (1) - NOVEMBER 1968 - NOVEMBER 1969

NOV DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUNE JULY AUG SEPT OCT NOV.



Total - 35

East 12 (4)

South Coast 10 (3)

Capital 9 (2)

Highlands 2 (5)

(1) For purposes of this graph both acts of violence includes shootings, bombings, etc.,
 assassinated bodies

(2) Capital Area: Sacatepequez, Guatemala

(3) South Coast: San Marcos, Quezaltenango, Retalhuleu, Suchitepequez, Escuintla, Santa Rosa

(4) Eastern Region: Jutiapa, Jalapa, El Progreso, Zacapa, Chiquimula, Izabal

(5) Highlands: Totonicapan, Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, El Quiche, Baja Verapaz, Solola

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